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ABSTRACT

Rationale and suggestions are given for conducting a cooperative TV/radio station market-wide community leaders survey. Guidelines for managing and organizing cooperative leader interviews deal with such considerations as (1) creating an organization, (2) developing work forms, (3) identifying community leaders, (4) reports to stockholders, (5) site selection, (6) scheduling of leaders, (7) rescheduling and refusals, (8) conducting interviews, (9) follow-up letters, and (10) final reports. (CMV)

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HOW TO
CONDUCT A
COOPERATIVE, MARKET-WIDE
COMMUNITY LEADERS SURVEY

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

Thomas M. Turner

Milwaukee

1977

IR006 189

(Written under a grant from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting)

There are at least five good reasons for television and radio stations in a market to ascertain community needs cooperatively.

1. RESEARCH IS RESEARCH

   Legitimate survey and market research techniques are duplicable. They turn the same results regardless of whether the research is being done by a public or commercial radio or television broadcaster, or a commercial or university research team.

2. 2 + 2 = 4. BUT WHAT DO WE DO WITH 4?

   Answers can be the same for an infinite number of questions. Asking the right questions is vital, but how research answers are used in programming marks the real difference between public and commercial television and radio.

3. IT'S GOOD BUSINESS

   The common sense economies of cooperation make joint Ascertainment in the best self-interest of all stations in a market.

4. IT'S GOOD PUBLIC RELATIONS

   Regardless of repeated claims to the contrary, public and commercial broadcasters within a market <u>are competitors</u> . . . for audiences, ratings, advertising/underwriting dollars, newspaper listings, press coverage, market awareness, corporate/institutional images, on-air image, creative and managerial staff, and peer recognition and status. Joint Ascertainment is an effective way to demonstrate a serious willingness to play by the same rules and be judged by the same standards as your commercial competition.

5. IT'S GOOD FOR YOUR STATION

Cooperating on Ascertainment brings your station upper and mid-management into noncompetitive contact with their markets' broadcasting counterparts as well as the social, organizational, political and business leadership of the community. As an added benefit, the Community Leader Interviews require your station management people to listen to other people and to try to understand their perspective. This regular immersion of station leadership into the problems and leadership of the community can result in sensitive and responsive management.

Stations in a market may or may not choose to supplement the FCC's cut and dried survey and interview requirements with a wide variety of other community input . . . suggested by their consciences, their market opportunities, their own creativity and intitiative and their attorneys. Among these supplements are: a) Quarterly meetings of a small, core group of different persons to discuss problems in the community, b) Continuing, periodic, formal interviewing of select community leaders, c) Informal personal interviews by news and editorial staffs at community meetings, informal events, etc., d) Formal dinner meetings, and e) Community cards, letters and phone calls in response to:

1. News items
2. Responses to editorials
3. Documentary public affairs programs
4. Community-Ombudsman-Helping programs.

Each station's management uses the results of many inputs to arrive at its final list of 10 problems.

It should be stressed that personal judgment at many levels plays a significant role in shaping each station's list. This is as it should be. Finalizing the list is the role of management, not of research.

Cooperative Area Leadership Interviews have been used in various markets with success for many years (Milwaukee and Portland are two examples). Cooperative General Public Surveys are also used successfully in many markets.

HOW TO ORGANIZE THE COOPERATIVE EFFORT

Start with a meeting of all market station managers to determine which stations wish to participate in a cooperative effort. A working luncheon meeting gets good response.

The agenda should propose a budget for the project, information on comparative costs if stations go-it-alone, and a station payment/cost assessment structure.

The managers should agree to:

1. Support a cooperative effort to be managed by a particular station, group or agency.
2. A tentative budget.
3. The geographical survey area.
4. Contract arrangements with outside survey/research groups to supply the General Public Survey.
5. The sample size and other specifications for the General Public Survey (including tentative dates).
6. Tentative dates for the Community Leader Survey interviews.
7. The number of leaders to be interviewed cooperatively.
8. The assignment of a contact person to handle work assignments at each station.
9. Length of each leader's interview.

Making these decisions at the first meeting is essential to get the co-op underway.

HOW TO MANAGE AND ORGANIZE COOPERATIVE LEADER INTERVIEWS

A. CREATE AN ORGANIZATION

Put five things together and you're open for business . . . any business, from ascertaining needs to selling record albums.

1. A NAME - To give you an identity.

Most markets do not have a permanent, formal broadcast organization. A pseudonym such as THE GREATER METROPOLITIAN ASSOCIATION OF BROADCASTERS will do.

2. AN ADDRESS AND PHONE NUMBER - To give you a home.

Rent a post office box for six months to handle the volume of mail and establish a telephone number for the project coordinator. Print these on all letterheads.

3. A PERSON IN CHARGE - To identify responsibility.

An identifiable contact person clears lines of communication for everyone. Print this person's name on all print material.

4. AN IMAGE

Station Managers generally want to be represented positively and with style. The substantial elements of an image are comprehensive planning, smooth execution and meaningful followup. These boil down to a good product. We found that at least two other things are necessary. First, a knowledgeable and pleasant person to answer your phone. Above average intra-personal and office skills are required of this person, as are tact, discretion, persistance and patience.

Second a successful print image must be developed.

Your print package must be a unified one. It should impress without being ostentatious and convey essentials without being cluttered.

Pay particular attention to the quality of paper used for both letterhead and envelopes. A clean, simple, impressive layout works best.

Your print package should include the following pieces to mail: Printed Letterhead (on which is printed the association name, address, phone number, coordinating person's name and the call letters and names of managers of participating stations); Second Sheets (same type and weight as that used for the letterhead and envelopes); Outgoing Envelopes (print association name and address in the space used for the RETURN address); and Return Envelopes (print association name and address in the space used for MAILING address).

Pre-plan the number of each item printed to meet your needs. Better too many than too few of each piece.

5. AN ACCOUNTING SYSTEM

Use whatever works for you in keeping track of your cash flow, obligations and receivables.

ORGANIZING THE LEADERS INTERVIEWS

The objective of Cooperative Community Leader Interviews is convenience for Community Leaders and Cooperating Station Personnel. Sessions must provide each Leader an ample, open-ended opportunity to express himself thoroughly on community problems, and an equal opportunity for each Broadcaster to thoroughly question each Leader in a direct face-to-face environment. Your role is to provide, structure, and insure this environment.

Here is a checklist with guidelines for setting up the sessions.

1. SET UP TIMELINES, DEADLINES, AND KEY DATES.

Whenever you are setting up interviews (whether for one day or ten

days) have dates firmly established and backtime your work schedule accordingly.

2. DEVELOP WORK FORMS AND HAVE A SUFFICIENT SUPPLY PRINTED

To coordinate the scheduling of one or more conference rooms at the same time across several days, a wall-size grid is most helpful. Write in pencil because your entries will change. Smaller grids will be useful later to distribute interview schedule information to participants and interviewees.

A Community Leader Recommendation Form is useful. A supply of these forms should be mailed to each station's contact person and returned to the coordinator with the names of leaders each station wants included on the master leader list. Be sure to list each Leader's organization, address and phone number.

3. IDENTIFYING COMMUNITY LEADERS

Perhaps the most sensitive ascertainment requirement is the identification of community leaders to be invited and interviewed. There are many ways to identify "Leaders". Among them, the following: Lists from past ascertainments; other stations; corporate underwriting prospects; various public affairs departments; the telephone book; and the community leader recommendation forms will create a healthy starting point for filling the 20 elements of the FCC Community Leader checklist.

Use a <u>small</u> group of area station community or public affairs directors to catagorize, screen and finalize the master list. Circulate this list to the stations for last minute changes. Then invite these Community leaders to participate. Of course, each station will need to contact and interview additional leaders on an individual basis and can use names that did not survive the group Master List screening.

One extremely important problem is the identification of "hidden leaders" . . . people who guide various aspects of community thought, opinion, activity, events or politics. Up-front leadership is easy to locate but in many cases the real power or opinion leader is not the up-front person. This is true in virtually all of the FCC categories.

Consider the case of the community organizer who provides expertise and direction for a number of community organizations, yet may be completely transparent to the stations in their quest for real leadership.

4. REPORTS TO THE STOCKHOLDERS

Remember to keep the cooperating station managers aware of your plans and progress by mailing them periodic, to-the-point, up-date letters.

5. SITE SELECTION

Your interview site should be as convenient to as many people as possible. It is most desirable to have all sessions at the same location to avoid confusion and it's just good public relations to select a site that is located in the "City of License."

Selection criteria should include convenient location, parking (valet is helpful in downtown locations), physical layout (adjacent rooms and a "headquarters room" work well), quality food/bar service and a good package price.

A good catering or special events coordinator at the hotel/motel site is a great asset when arranging conferences.

Sessions frequently last all day so early morning coffee and doughnuts and coffee and soft drinks during morning or afternoon break is a welcome relief.

6. SCHEDULING THE LEADERS

From the master list of leaders, arbitrarily schedule people into the interview slots on your master grid. Remember to write names and list-reference[1] numbers in pencil.

When you are going through the arbitrary scheduling process remember that most interviewers will be in a conference room for up to 10 interviews per day. Try to schedule Leaders to give interviewers some variety in Leader catagories from hour to hour.

When your aribitary scheduling is complete, mail individually typed personal invitation letters to each leader. Avoid the form-letter appearance. Rental or use of a "Mag-card" machine combines the advantages of a form letter with the personal look. Each letter should be personally signed by the project coordinator.

Each initial contact letter package should include a "turnaround" form, and stamped, return envelope. The turnaround form is used by Community Leaders for either confirmation, rescheduling or refusal; and also to provide some biographical information on the leader. Avoid the confusion of illegible signatures on the response form by typing each leader's name and list-reference code on the turnaround form.

Initial contact letter must be persuasive, well constructed, clear and above all, must get results.

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[1]The list-reference number pin-points a particular name's location on your master list. It is a combination of the FCC category or element number and the individual person's number on that category list. For example, FCC checklist #8 is Environment and Harry Brockel is the 2nd name on the Milwaukee master list under environment. So when he is tentatively scheduled on the master grid the Code (8-2) should follow his name. In this way you will know what list he is on, and can locate his specifics (i.e., organization, phone number, etc.) quickly.

7. RESCHEDULING AND REFUSALS

Rescheduling will run about 50%. Fortunately, using arbitrary scheduling, the odds are that almost every interview slot that clears out can be filled by someone else who wants to change their time or date. Refusals should be handled personally by the coordinator and can usually be handled with one phone call. Reschedulings can be handled by the secretary or assistant.

Careful records must be kept. Lock in verifications and reschedules with some code on your master grid. Where it is not possible to reschedule a respondent where he wishes use the telephone to set up an alternative. Refusal slots should be refilled with fresh names, from the same category. You will want to devise a contact status tracking system . . . perhaps using coded shapes and/or colors on the grid. Each person's recordkeeping techniques will vary.

There will be a certain number of leaders who will fail to respond at all. The best way to contact these people is by telephone. Some will not have understood the scope of the activity, others simply will not have made a decision. At this point there is no substitute for perseverance.

Send follow-up letters of confirmation/verification only when a name is locked-in, regardless of whether that leader was finalized by phone or letter. Whenever a day's schedule grid is filled it can be final typed and distributed to station participants.

Reminder phone calls should be made to a Leader's office on the work day prior to his scheduled appearance.

Keep a few Community Leaders' names "unscheduled" to fill in last-minute cancellations. Only a frantic, last-minute phone campaign can sometimes fill unexpected vacancies.

8. THE INTERVIEWS

Set up daily accommodations with the hotel/motel staff prior to the arrival of station representatives and community leaders. Check the set up carefully each day. Conference rooms should be set up theatre style facing a front speaker's table complete with a pitcher of ice water, clean glasses, table cloth, and two chairs . . . one for the guest and the other for the moderator/host.

Have a reception desk outside the conference rooms where the coordinator and his assistant act as hosts. Broadcasters and guests are to come to the registration table and sign in. Keep a daily (am/pm) attendance list for Broadcasters. This helps to keep track of which stations are adequately represented.

Very accurate records must be kept by the assistant of those Leaders who appeared, did not appear, or sent substitutes. During the day the assistant also makes phone calls to check on late arrivals and no-shows. Whenever possible try to schedule an alternate to replace an absent guest.

When each guest arrives they should be welcomed by the hosts, a name tag made out, and then introduced to the moderator for their session.

9. THE ROLE OF THE MODERATOR

The purpose of the interviews is to <u>hear</u> what each leader thinks are "the area's most important problems, needs and interests." Moderators in each room are essential to insure that the sessions maintain

an environment conducive to fulfilling this purpose.

Solicite volunteer moderators from the audience of broadcasters and give them instructions explaining the job and responsibilities.

Moderator's should greet guests, usher them into the conference room and act as a host and moderator. Start each interview by introducing the guest and validating basic information which has been distributed to participants. (Name, title, business address, organization(s) represented.)

Guests can be set at ease if the participants introduce themselves (Name, station, affiliation(s), and position). The moderator then asks the guest to state, from their organization's point of view what are the area's most important problems, needs and interests.

Moderators should ask guests to comment on any problems starting from their field of expertise . . . but not limited to it. This encourages leaders to respond personally as well as professionally. Moderators guide any question/answer interchange following a guest's remarks.

Moderators should not permit station representatives to argue with guests or engage in philosophical discussions.

When there are no further questions, the moderator thanks the guest on behalf of the broadcasters and ushers him or her to the reception desk.

D. THE BUSINESS OF WRAPPING UP

After the final session the project must be wrapped up.

1. FOLLOW-UP LETTER TO GUESTS

A thank you to the Community Leaders is their record of their appearance and is your leavetaking until you ask them to participate

again . . . and you probably will. You will be judged by what this letter says, and how it looks. Again, use individually typed personal letters.

2. PAYING THE BILLS

It is just good business to pay your bills as soon as they are received. Don't wait until the broadcasters have paid you before you pay your creditors. If need be, you can always float a short-term loan at your bank to meet your cash flow needs. If you do, remember to add any interest to the bill you send the broadcasters.

3. FINAL REPORT

A final report letter should be mailed to the station managers represented by the cooperative effort. It should include:

a. The final budget

b. A complete final list of Leaders who appeared, by FCC category (name, position, affiliation(s), address and phone number).

c. A complete list of Community Leaders whose names were on the original master list, but for some reason were not interviewed. (This also provides a record of attempts to contact each individual and why you were unsuccessful.)

d. And, of course, your bill based on the pre-agreed, share-per-station. The bill should include administration time and build in a profit. While this may not be consistent with the present philosophies of some people in public broadcasting, it is consistent with the survival of the business of Public Television. Ten to 15% for your "time and effort" is acceptable and indeed sensible.

5. COLLECTION

Some follow-up may be required in order to get checks from some broadcasters. Usually this can be done with a phone call. Sometimes circumstances require other, more innovative collection techniques.

Coordinating your market's cooperative ascertainment effort successfully can be a real plus for your station in many ways. The problems are varied. the track is fast and the rewards are long term . . . perhaps intangible. But the economic savings coupled with the gratitude of the other broadcasters in the market makes the experience worthwhile.